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Congressmen Urge Creation of 'Drug Czar'

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A congressional delegation urged President Reagan today to sign a bill that would create a Cabinet-level "drug czar" with extensive powers to oversee the government's war on illegal drug traffic.

Sen. Joseph R. Biden Jr., D-Del., said Reagan "strongly objects to, or has great doubt about," the new position.

The so-called drug czar would be empowered to order other Cabinet officials, including the director of the CIA, the attorney general and the secretary of state, to follow his priorities in combating drugs.

"The president is being told by all, as you might expect, every bureaucratic agency, 'No, we don't like that idea,'" said Biden. "He's got to settle the turf war."

"We should have a person at a federal level that can tell the State Department, can tell the intelligence community, that the priorities in drug enforcement are 'a, b and c' and we task a portion of your operation to do that," Biden said.

Sen. Strom Thurmond, R-S.C., chairman of the Judiciary Committee, said he was hopeful but not confident that an arrangement could be reached that would allow Reagan to sign the measure already approved by Congress.

"It is my hope the president will sign this bill and then he will introduce a bill to overcome the main objection of the Justice Department on the czar provision," said Thurmond.

Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., said "prospects are good the matter can be worked out." He said talks would continue during the day with Justice Department officials.

Reps. William J. Hughes, D-N.J., and Harold Sawyer, R-Mich., also urged Reagan to sign the measure.

Biden and Specter said a veto of the bill would imperil chances for passage of any further crime legislation in the new Congress.

The drug-czar provision was included in a crime bill that would make it easier for federal prosecutors to seize the assets of drug smugglers and increase the fines that can be levied against drug dealers.